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A F A T H E R T O H I S S O N  

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A T T H E  
U N I V E R S I T Y :  
  
R E L A T I V E T O A L A T E  
A D D R E S S T O Y O U N G S T U D E N T S , &c.

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Ἕνιοι, Φεύγοντες τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν, ἐμπίπτουσιν εἰς  
ἀθεότητα τραχεῖαν καὶ ἀντίτυπον.

PLUTARCH. περὶ Δείσιδαιμ.

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O X F O R D :

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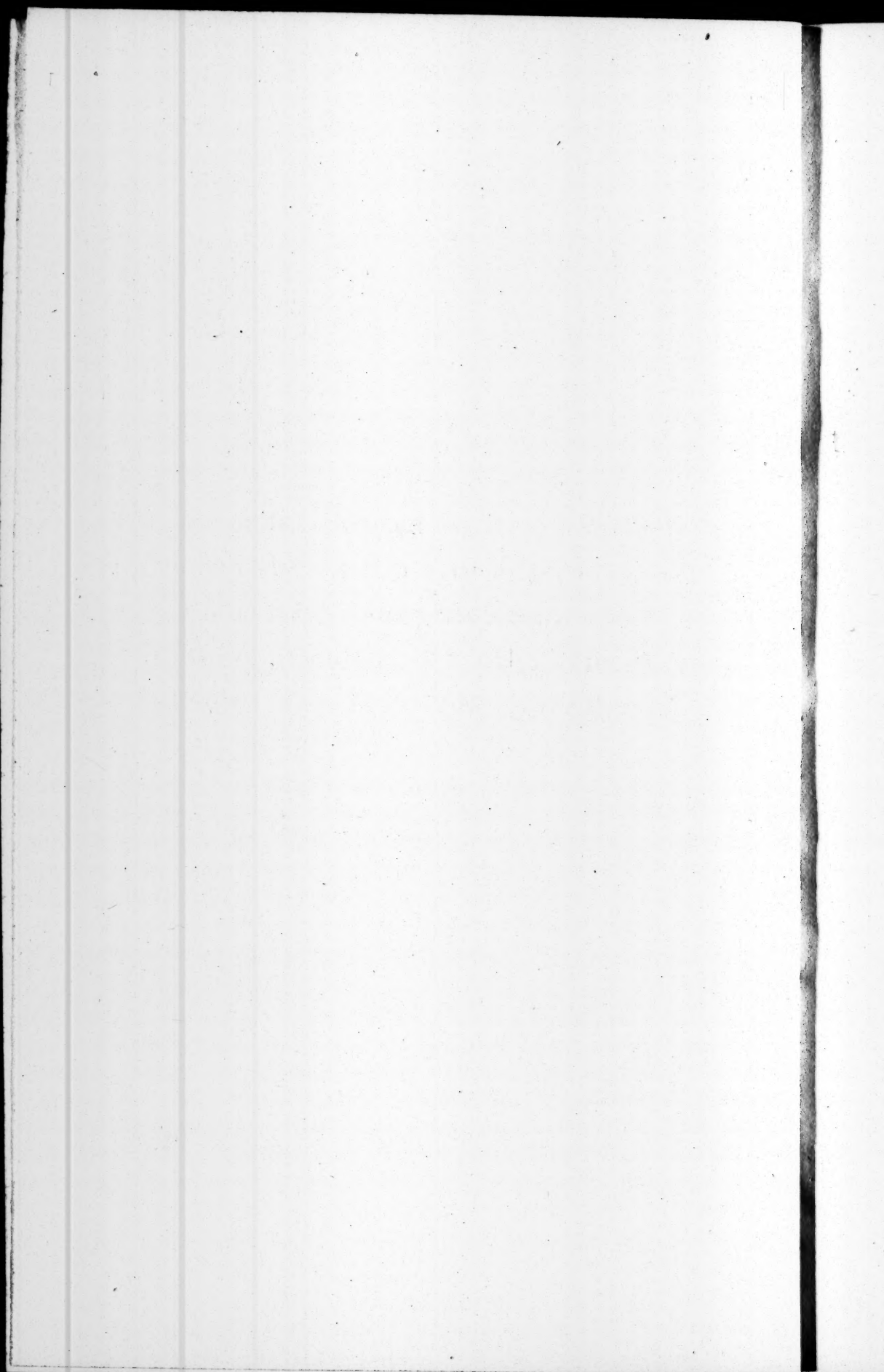
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M D C C L X X V I I .



## ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following Letter (a considerable part of it at least) was really written, with a view to prevent a serious youth from being made uneasy by Dr. P—y's "Address to young Students" if it should fall into his hands: and thinking it might be of use to other young men, I had prepared it for the press, before I saw the ingenious pamphlet, signed "*An Undergraduate*" or, the "*Letter to Dr. Priestley, by a Country Parson.*" But, as an object placed in one point of view may catch the attention of those, who might overlook it, in another light, I have ventured to join the cry; which such an outrage on the public will certainly produce.





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## L E T T E R, &c.

May 29. 1787.

MY DEAR CHARLES,

I HOPE that by this time you are reconciled to a college life; and that you will prosecute your studies with some regularity. Do not indulge yourself in that desultory way of reading, which Dr. Johnson is *said* to have been fond of: though I am convinced, that, at the University, he must have gone through an uniform course of Study, and have made himself master of the sciences usually taught there; otherwise, he could never have written in so clear and systematic a manner, as, on almost every subject, he has done. I hope you will allot a proper portion of your time, on Sundays at least, to religious subjects;

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especially

especially of the *practical* kind : but I would not wish you, at present, to meddle with any *speculative* or controversial points, which would only puzzle and perplex you ; and divert your attention from what is your more immediate concern, the study of the initiatory sciences ; of logic and mathematics ; natural and moral philosophy ; which are a necessary foundation for either of the three learned professions.

Yet if you listen to Dr. P—y's "*Address to young Students*" (on which subject I now write to you) you must lay aside all those studies, for which I am at the expence of giving you an University education, and enter into the wide field of controversial divinity ; and not take one step in your academical course, or accept of any scholarship or fellowship, till you have *formed* a *system* of religion for *yourself* ; and have "*settled your Creed* ;" which, if you pursue the Doctor's method, will prove a tedious process, or, at least, a work of time ; as he tells  
his

his friend Dr. *Price*, he has not yet *settled his own Creed*; though he must be pretty near his grand climacteric.

That you may not be too much alarmed, nor be imposed upon by the decisive and dogmatical air, with which, in these extraordinary Letters, Dr. *P—y* addresses you, I would have you reflect, with what indecent presumption, he takes it for granted, that those truths, which have been believed and held as sacred by the Christian church for seventeen hundred years, have been embraced, as the true sense of Scripture, by individuals of the greatest parts and learning, both in ancient and modern times: and, particularly after a rigid and minute investigation, have been admitted, with some slight *distinctions*, even by Dr. *Clarke*, nay, by Dr. *P—y*'s friend, Dr. *Price*, and by other deep *reasoners*, not strictly orthodox; and are zealously maintained by other dissenters from the established church, of almost every denomination. After all these respectable attes-

tations, I say, that Dr. P—y alone should have *discovered* these truths to have no foundation in Scripture ; and speak of those that maintain them with the utmost contempt, as bigots to authority ; and set up his own opinion, as the only standard of truth, is surely a most extraordinary phenomenon in the present republic of letters.

Dr. P—y is indisputably an excellent chymist and electrical philosopher, writes plausibly and ingeniously upon a great variety of subjects ; is of unexceptionable morals, and I am told an amiable disposition in private life. But the man who roundly asserts, that the *popular* opinion of a *soul*, as distinct from the body, has no foundation in reason or Scripture ; who calls *Moses's* history of the Creation “ *a lame account,*” speaks contemptuously of St. *Paul* ; and makes even our blessed Saviour himself as *peccable* and as liable to error, as other mortals : such a man ought surely to be listened to with no common degree of caution ; and his opinions  
not



not implicitly received as the dictates of infallibility.

The truth is, Dr. *P—y* will believe nothing which he cannot perfectly comprehend ; and disclaims with disdain, the propriety of the distinction, of things *above* and things *contrary* to reason. As therefore it is impossible for a finite understanding to comprehend an infinite Being, he must of course (to act consistently) give up the belief of a *Deity*, as well as of a *Trinity*. And indeed, though Dr. *P—y* professes to believe in the moral attributes of God (and, I am convinced, is sincere in that profession) yet his doctrine of *materialism* certainly militates against every idea of an intelligent first cause : and therefore, as he goes beyond *Socinus* in his theological tenets, he seems to approach very nearly to *Hobbes* and *Spinoza* in the atheistical tendency, at least, of his philosophical system.

I have said thus much (though unwillingly) of the ingenious Author of this

“ Address

“ Address to young Students,” that you may not be prepossessed in favour of a name, which stands enrolled (as that of an excellent *experimental philosopher*) amidst the most learned societies of *Europe* and *America*!

I shall not enter into the merits of the disputed points to which these Letters allude; nor, if I thought myself qualified, should I think it necessary to defend the doctrines of our church; that having been so repeatedly performed by very able hands.

I shall only observe, in regard to the divinity of our Saviour, (the great object of Dr. P—y’s inveteracy) that there are so many texts, in the New Testament, which, in their most *obvious* sense, evidently imply this doctrine, that it might, at least, have escaped Dr. P—y’s triumphant ridicule.

He tells his friend Dr. Price, that *his Logos* is quite a *diminutive* little gentleman, in comparison with Dr. Clarke’s *Logos*; and rallies him unmercifully, on his prejudices, and his timidity, in not launching out boldly,  
into



into the wide ocean of heterodoxy, in defiance of consequences, as he himself has done.

Let us suppose, however, on this particular, that the words in the first chapter of St. *John*, which have been always understood so fully to point out our Blessed Saviour by the term *Logos*, mean no more than the Almighty *Fiat*; or the command, by which God produced the light and the other wonders of the Creation, as Dr. P—y somewhere asserts, and let us translate it accordingly, and see what sense we can make of it.

“ In the beginning was the *Fiat*; and the  
 “ *Fiat* was with God; and the *Fiat* was  
 “ God; &c. And the *Fiat* was *made flesh*  
 “ and *dwelt* among us; and we beheld his  
 “ *glory*, the glory as of the only begotten  
 “ of the Father; full of grace and truth.”  
 that is, says Dr. P—y, “ *God spake to man-*  
 “ *kind by Jesus Christ.*” But if that is all  
 which is meant by the words of this pomp-  
 ous exordium; and they do not mean what  
 they

they evidently *appear to mean*, that Jesus Christ, the subject of his gospel, was a *divine person*, St. *John* is a very extraordinary writer.

Well; suppose they do: Dr. P—y will tell us, that Christ was called a *divine person*, as we call *Plato* or *Socrates divine*; to express our sense of their sublime doctrines and uncommon virtues. Or, that in the figurative style of the Eastern languages, Magistrates and persons invested with extraordinary power, are sometimes styled gods; or if this cannot be admitted in *every* passage that speaks of Christ, he will boldly say, (as some of his friends have done) that the first chapter of St. *John*, and the first and second chapters of St. *Matthew* and St. *Luke*, &c. were probably interpolated or foisted in, for some purpose or other, by the Lord knows whom or when. For the sacred text (every one knows) has been carefully and jealously watched, and regularly quoted as the word of God by different sects, from  
the

the very times of our Saviour and his Apostles to this day.

In short, Dr. *P—y* is determined not to admit the divinity of Christ. He therefore, in the first place, endeavours to give a new and, often, unheard of, sense to every text, that makes against him : if he cannot do that to his satisfaction, he pretends it is an interpolation ; and boldly strikes it out. And thus, right or wrong, will make every thing submit to his arbitrary hypothesis : as *Cromwell*, when he was resolved to make himself absolute and an *Unitarian*, murdered the King ; turned out the Parliament ; knocked down the Levellers ; and, by fraud or force ; by kicking or canting ; made every one contribute towards the accomplishing his purpose.

The primitive Fathers, in their disputes with heretics (as I have somewhere read) first asked them, “ whether they acknowledged the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures ;” if they did, they reasoned with

with them from thence ; if they did not, there was an end of the dispute, they had no further *communication* with them.

Dr. P—y calls himself a Christian ; as a follower of *Pythagoras*, I suppose, called himself a Pythagorean. *Pythagoras's* scholars however paid a greater deference to *their* master than Dr. P—y does to *his* : and “ *ipse* “ *dixit* ” “ the *master* has said it ” silenced all objections : they never disputed about the possibility of what he asserted, or suspected that he “ *reasoned inconclusively.* ” They were thankful for the instruction he gave them ; and *humbly* acquiesced. It has always been esteemed as one principal advantage of the Christian Revelation, that it gives us a certain and unerring rule of faith and ~~duty~~ <sup>duty</sup>. Christ was said to teach, “ as one having “ *authority*, and not as the *Scribes.* ” “ In “ this sense (at least) he spake as never man “ spake.” But if we take away the *inspiration* or *divine authority* of the Scripture, *Socrates* and *Tully* have *spoken* full as well, in  
many



many respects. And *Xenophon's Memorabilia* or *Tully's Offices*, and other philosophical works, may be put upon a level, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Though I am convinced, that the church of *England* approaches as *near* at least as any other church to the primitive doctrines, yet I am no bigot, *Charles*, to what is called orthodoxy: and confess, that when I was a young man, I was inclined to think very freely upon these subjects: and was a little staggered, particularly at the doctrine of the Trinity. But, the more I enquired into this mysterious affair, the more I was convinced, that it was *revealed* in the *Holy Scriptures*.

The text which first struck me most powerfully, and which I think decisive, and an unanswerable proof of our Saviour's divinity, is that well known text, in the ninth chapter of St. *Paul's* Epistle to the *Romans*; where enumerating the many peculiar privileges of the *Israelites*, he crowns them all with observing,

serving, that of *them*, “ concerning the *flesh*,  
 “ Christ came, who (according to his *divine*  
 “ *nature*) is over all, God blessed for ever.  
 “ Amen.”

“ And when our Saviour desires to be glo-  
 “ rified, with the glory which he had with  
 “ God, before the world began,” (*John* xvii.  
 5.) And when it is said, (*Phil.* ii. 6.) that  
 “ although he was in the form of God, and  
 “ equal with God; yet he humbled him-  
 “ self; and was made in the likeness of  
 “ men.” If these words do not demolish  
 the *Socinian* system, and imply, that Jesus  
 Christ was *something* more than mere man,  
 and had an existence before he was born of  
 the Virgin *Mary*; we can depend upon no  
 written testimony, in any case, whatsoever.

I did not intend to have entered, even thus  
 far, into the merits of this controversy; but  
 as I have dissuaded *you* from meddling with  
 these speculative opinions at present, I have  
 just pointed out to you these few plain texts;  
 to convince you, that the Scriptures are not  
 so



so decidedly in his favour, as Dr. P—y's <sup>vicissitude</sup> insulting air might perhaps incline you to suspect.

As Dr. P—y has appropriated to himself and his followers, the title of *Unitarians*, he charitably supposes, that we, whom he calls *Trinitarians*, worship three Gods. But surely, without incurring such an imputation, we may say, what the Scripture evidently implies, that in the divine nature or essence, there is a threefold distinction. That it is above our comprehension, is no more an objection, than it is to God's having existed from all eternity; though no finite understanding can comprehend the manner of such existence.

As for the practical uses of the doctrine, which we contend for, and which Dr. P—y thinks so unfriendly to true piety; when we address the divine Being, not only as the Creator of the Universe, but, as he has revealed himself, in the amiable character of a Redeemer; and as a friend that knows our

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infirmities,

infirmities, and assists us by his Holy Spirit in performing his will ; we have certainly a more determinate and more *interesting* object of worship, than Dr. P—y's *Unitarian* mechanics ; who are taught to “ worship they “ know not what ; a cold, abstracted, philosophical idea ; which they can neither “ love or fear. They are lost in the immensity of the divine nature ; the imagination ranges through the boundless regions of empty space ; and finds nothing to “ interest the heart or engage the affections.”

We are commanded, “ to honour the Son, “ as we honour the Father,” which we may certainly do, without being guilty of idolatry ; as we believe him to be co-eternal and co-equal with the Father. And, as even Dr. *Clarke* himself allows, that the Son partakes of all the attributes of divinity, except self-origination. \*

\* Dr. *Price* also asserts, “ That from his miraculous conception, and his coming down from heaven ; from his immaculate character, and unparralled wisdom ; from the efficacy

But then, as the great Bishop *Sherlock* observes, “ the honour paid to Christ is ultimately referred to God the Father ; who has exalted him to the Glory, which he had with the Father before the worlds were made ; and given him to be head over all principalities and powers ; even to the consummation of all things.” \*

But to return to the principal intention of this Letter which was to satisfy any scruples which may have been raised in your mind by Dr. *P—y*’s “ Address to Young Students.”

As I have endeavoured, my Son, to breed you up in the principles of, what I verily believe to be, the true religion, you are convinced, I hope, that “ *instead* of a fish, I would not give you a serpent ;” or instead of the

“ cacy ascribed to his death, and from his resurrection ; and his being appointed to judge the world ; from these and other honours ascribed to Christ in the Scriptures, we may safely conclude, he says, that he was of a superior order to man.” Sermon on the Christ. Doctrine, &c.

\* *Sherlock*’s Discourses, Vol. IV. Disc. I. Part 4.

truth, endeavour to instil into your youthful mind the poison of superstition and error.

I made you read over the Articles of our church, which were drawn up by some of “ the best and wisest men in the Christian “ world.” If some things appear abstruse in those articles, a *latitude* seems to be allowed us by that general clause in the Article on Predestination ; “ we must receive God’s “ promises in such wise, as they be *generally* “ set forth to us in Holy Scripture, and expressly declared to us in the word of God.” (Art. 17.)

But as you seemed to have no objection to the principal Articles, the sense of which is obvious to the meanest capacity ; you ought, in those points, which are less clear, to submit, as you have done, to the united judgment of those learned men, who, in the several ages of the church, have made the Scriptures the study of their whole lives.

You are admitted into a society, where you hope to receive instruction and improvement.



ment. They have embraced the established religion of their country; which all good and wise men, in every age, have thought it their duty to comply with; and the University expects the same from the young people placed under their care. Any religious test, at their admission, might be thought unnecessary; but you only subscribe to the Articles, as a Layman; and as terms of peace and communion. For what confusion must be the consequence, if so many young people of different religious persuasions; *Papists* and *Presbyterians*; *Baptists* and *Independents*; *Methodists* and *Moravians*; if so many different Sectaries, who are generally taught to maintain their peculiar opinions with zeal and obstinacy, were jumbled together in one society; and to have separate places of worship; such a discordant multitude, in the heat of youth, would probably not long be confined to cool reasoning; but support their opinions, by the strength of their arms, rather than by that of their arguments. And

“*smite*

"*smite each other with the fist of wickedness,*" as they would reciprocally term the resistance of their Adversaries.

In short, my dear Charles, you have acted in obedience to your Father in subscribing the Articles; as, unless you saw manifest and *important* reasons to the contrary, it was your duty to do: if you live a sober, diligent and religious life, I trust, you will never be *called* to an account for embracing speculative opinions which have been held, with little variation, in the same sense, by the greatest and best men for seventeen hundred years; as the doctrines of the gospel.

But busy men, under a pretence of conscience or a zeal for liberty, are perpetually disturbing the peace of Society; and complaining of persecution, in an age, when every man writes and publishes, with impunity, whatever his fancy suggests or his resentment dictates. Deism is openly defended in a Christian country; and republican principles boldly propagated under a  
monarchial



monarchial government. The act of Toleration was formerly esteemed a great acquisition, by those that dissented from the established church : the slightest test is now exclaimed against as an intolerable hardship and a violation of the natural rights of mankind. And though we have so lately experienced the fatal effects of a licentious mob, spirited up, under pretence of zeal for the *Protestant Religion*, to commit the most horrid outrage, yet these advocates for liberty have not been ashamed to plead the cause of wretches under sentence of death for their crimes, and would persuade *them* that the laws which condemned them were arbitrary and unjust.

This, it will be said, is nothing to the present purpose. But those restless spirits, who so boldly propagate their own *private* opinions, in opposition to our ecclesiastical establishment, proceed upon principles, which have a tendency to undermine the foundations of all government. “ *Nolo*  
“ *seditiosam*

“*seditiosam veritatem*,” said the wife and  
“learned *Erasmus*. He would have thought  
“it better to acquiesce in a few flight spe-  
“culative errors, than to disturb the peace  
“of Society by propagating even the truth  
“in a seditious manner.”

I will conclude this letter with the advice  
of *Solomon*.

“My Son, fear thou the Lord and the  
“King ; and meddle not with them that are  
“given to change.”

From your affectionate Father,

\* \* \* \*